

CD INSIDE
featuring songs and a
read-aloud by children's music
star **RALPH COVERT**
of *Ralph's World!*

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A NUTTY NUTCRACKER CHRISTMAS

by Ralph Covert *and* G. Riley Mills
illustrated by Wilson Swain

This is no ordinary
Nutcracker . . .

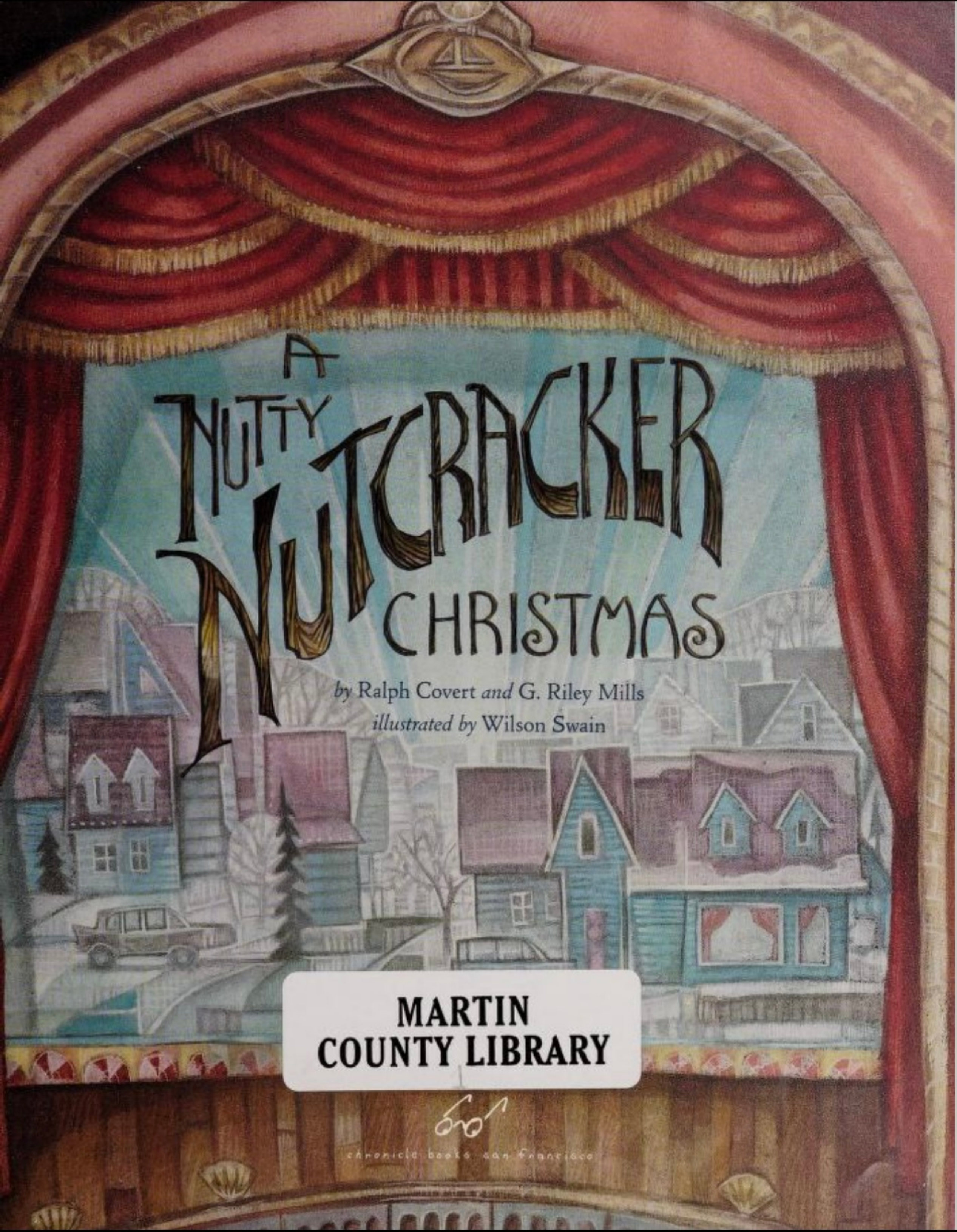
This time, it's *Fritz's* story.

All Fritz wants to do on Christmas Eve is play his video game, *Mouse Hunter 5000*, but when he breaks his sister's nutcracker, his game gets locked in the toy closet. Fritz is furious until an amazing thing happens: the evil Mouse King from his video game comes to life . . . and so does the Nutcracker! The Mouse King is determined to ruin Christmas, and Fritz and the Nutcracker will have to join forces—and take a magical journey—to stop him!

The traditional *Nutcracker* tale gets turned on its head in this rollicking Christmas adventure, based on the hit musical *A Nutty Nutcracker Christmas* by the popular children's book star Ralph Covert (*Ralph's World*) and playwright G. Riley Mills. Includes a CD of songs from the musical, and a read-aloud track with the music and story woven together. It's a musical picture book!

NUTTY NUTCRACKER CHRISTMAS

1. "Nutcracker Christmas"
Sung by Ralph Covert.
2. "Eve in Our House"
Sung by Anna Fermin as Clara, with Steve Gerlach, and Ralph Covert.
3. "A Natural"
Sung by Steve Gerlach as Fritz.
4. "Let's Ruin Christmas"
Sung by Andy Rothenberg as the Mouse King.
5. "Welcome to Christmas Wood"
Sung by Ralph Covert as the Mayor, with Rich Parenti.
6. "Don't Say Impossible"
Sung by Anna Fermin as the Nutcracker and Steve Gerlach as Fritz.



A NUTTY NUTCRACKER CHRISTMAS

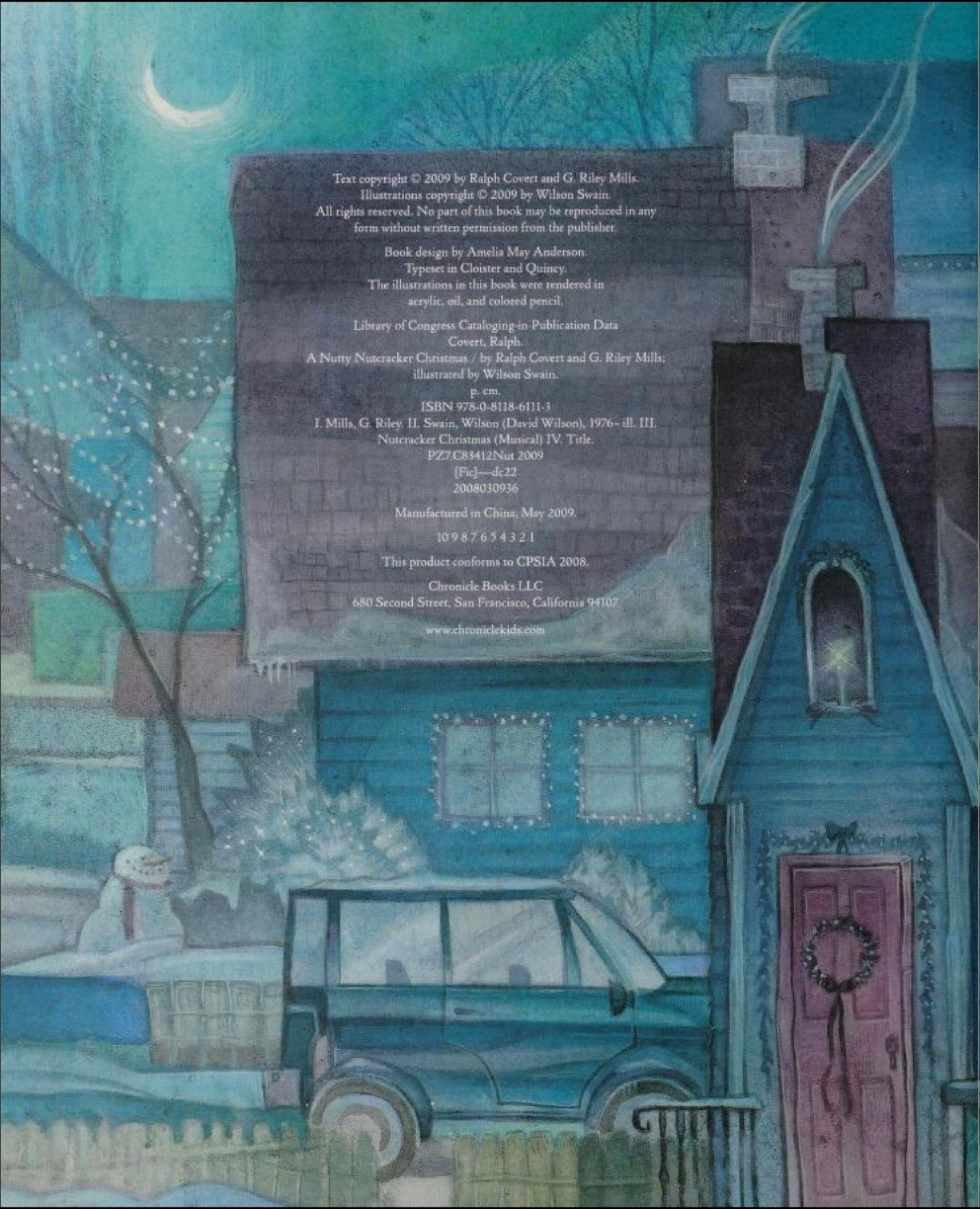
by Ralph Covert and G. Riley Mills

illustrated by Wilson Swain

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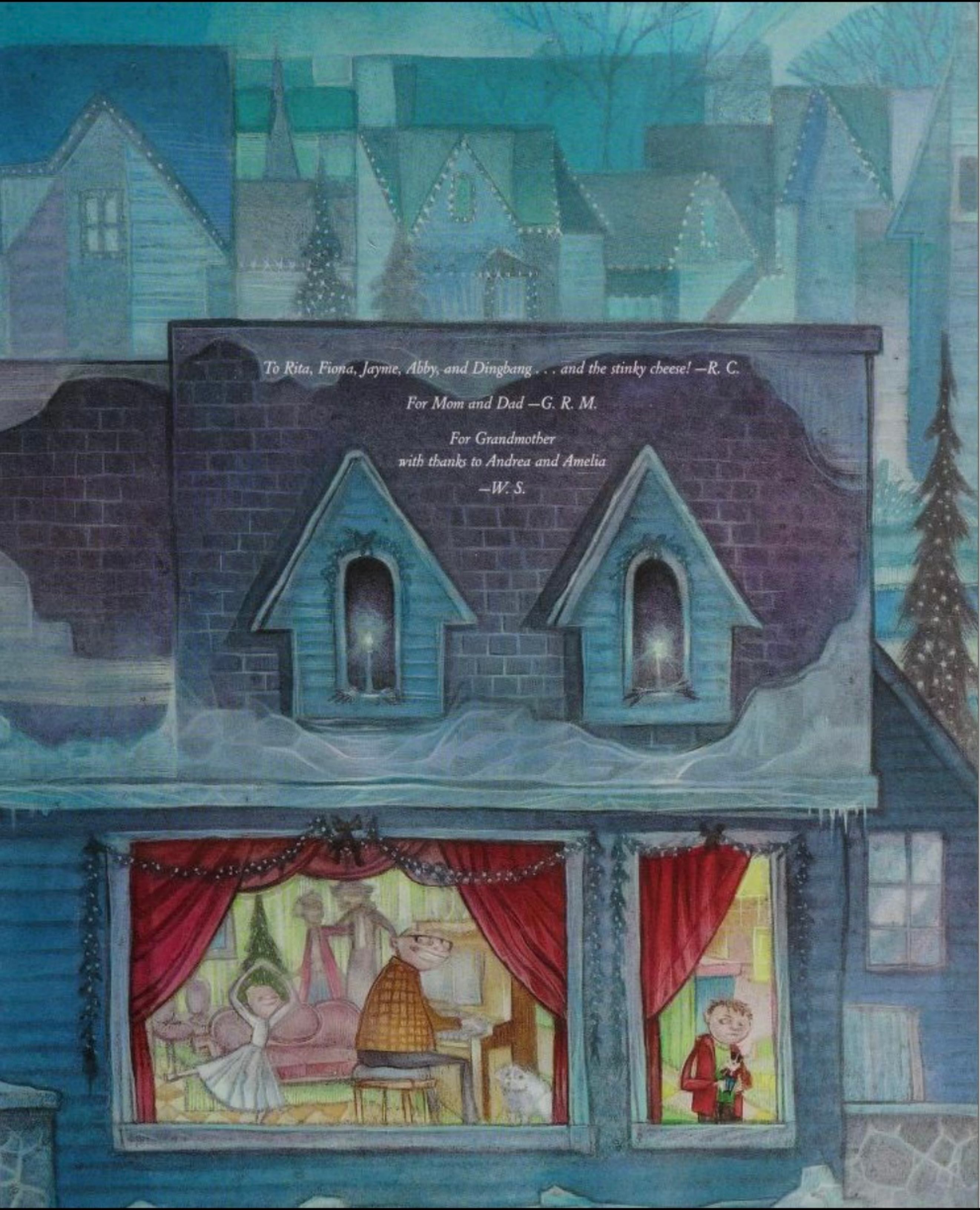
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To Rita, Fiona, Jayme, Abby, and Dingbang . . . and the stinky cheese! —R. C.

For Mom and Dad —G. R. M.

*For Grandmother
with thanks to Andrea and Amelia*

—W. S.



'T WAS THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS,
and everyone at the Stahlbaum house was merry . . . until Fritz
Stahlbaum got himself in VERY BIG TROUBLE.

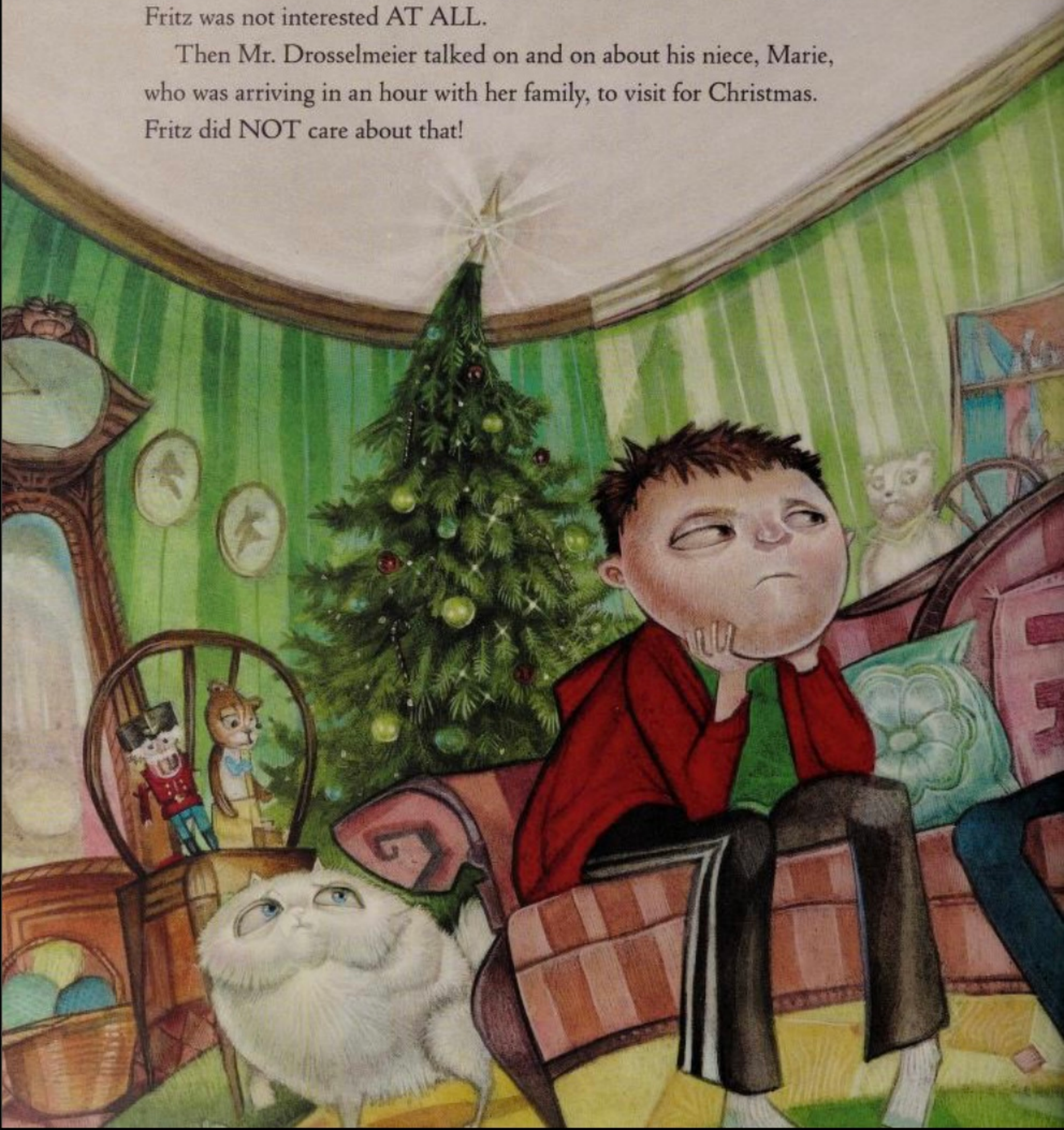
You see, he broke his sister Clara's favorite nutcracker doll.
So Fritz was grounded. And accused of terrible things.

But the worst part of all, the most tragic, the most unfair and
unreasonable part, was that Fritz's favorite video game, Mouse
Hunter 5000, was taken away and locked in the toy closet!

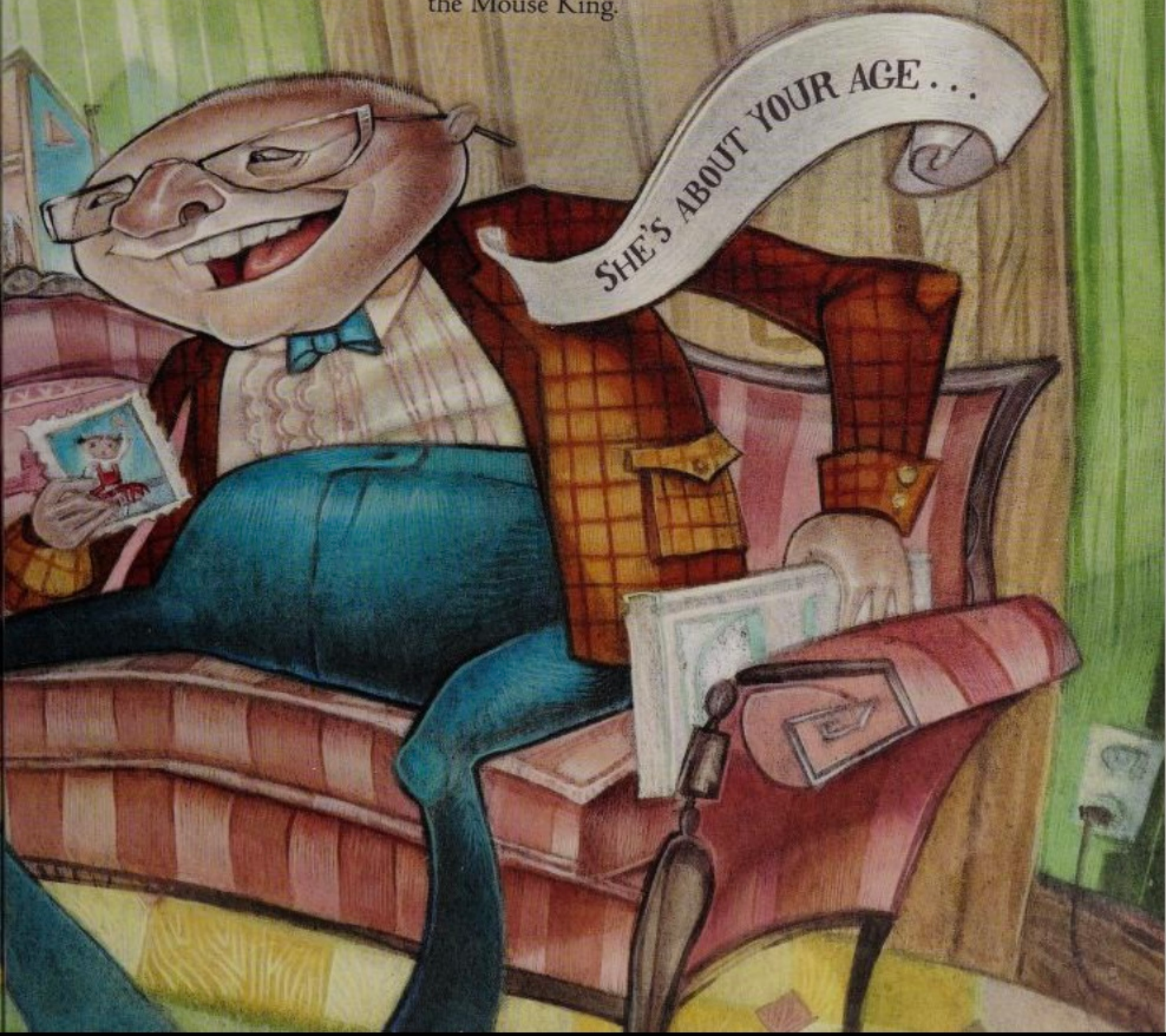


And *then* everyone left to see the *Nutcracker* ballet, and Fritz had to stay home with the neighbor, boring old Mr. Drosselmeier, who **INSISTED** on telling him the story of the Nutcracker, even though Fritz was not interested **AT ALL**.

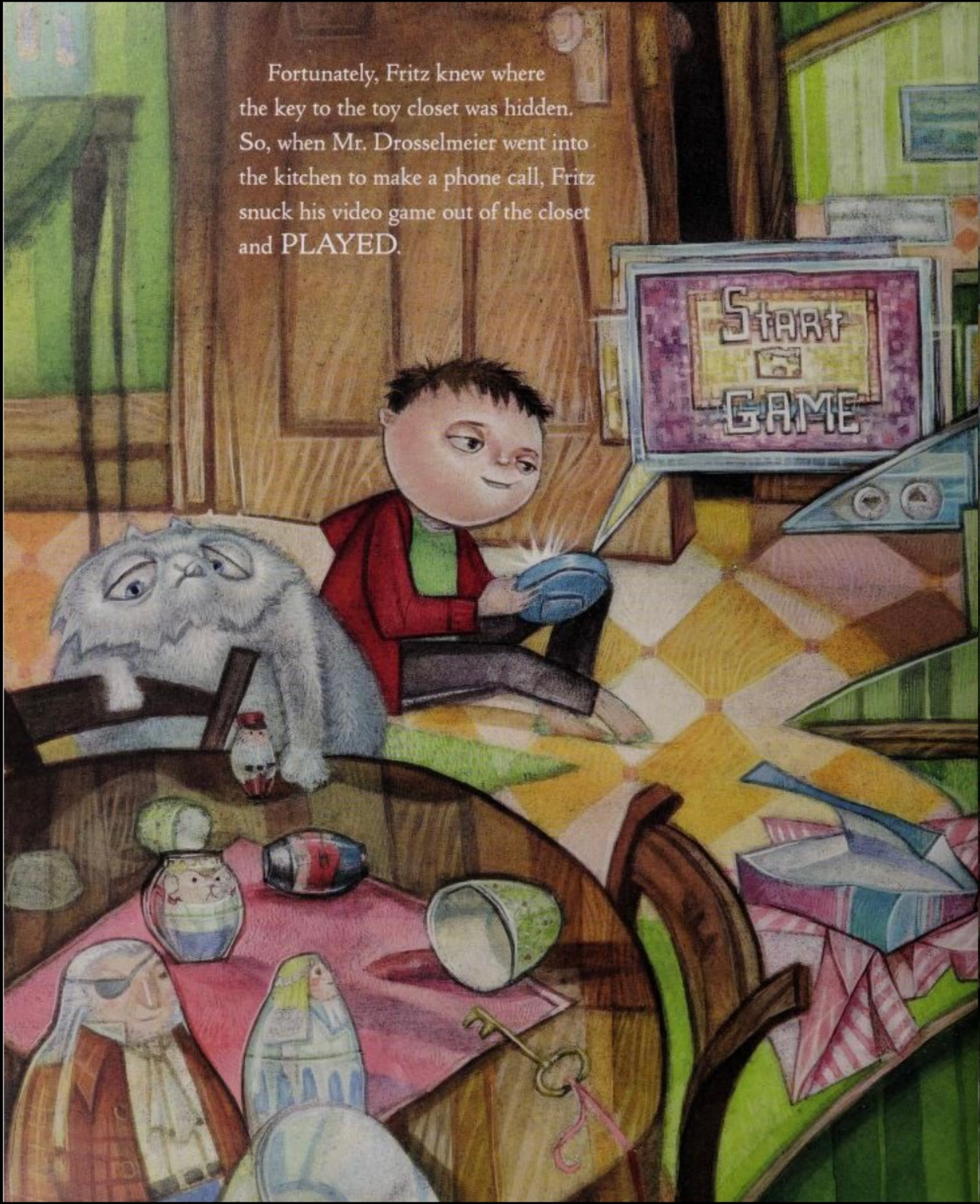
Then Mr. Drosselmeier talked on and on about his niece, Marie, who was arriving in an hour with her family, to visit for Christmas. Fritz did **NOT** care about that!



All Fritz really cared about was the loss of Mouse Hunter 5000. After all, he was THIS CLOSE to reaching Level 22, where he would finally have a chance to conquer the Mouse King.



Fortunately, Fritz knew where
the key to the toy closet was hidden.
So, when Mr. Drosselmeier went into
the kitchen to make a phone call, Fritz
snuck his video game out of the closet
and **PLAYED**.





And PLAYED.



And PLAYED some more.

Over the giant wheel of cheese he went, down through the secret tunnel, up past the peppermint trees, and before Fritz knew it—HIGH SCORE! He had made it to LEVEL 22! Fritz was pretty sure he was the first kid in history ever to get there!

He began doing his victory dance around the living room when suddenly . . .



... he noticed a strange glow coming from inside the toy closet! Fritz could hardly believe his eyes.

The closet began to rattle and rumble. The door flew open with a BANG and out came none other than ...

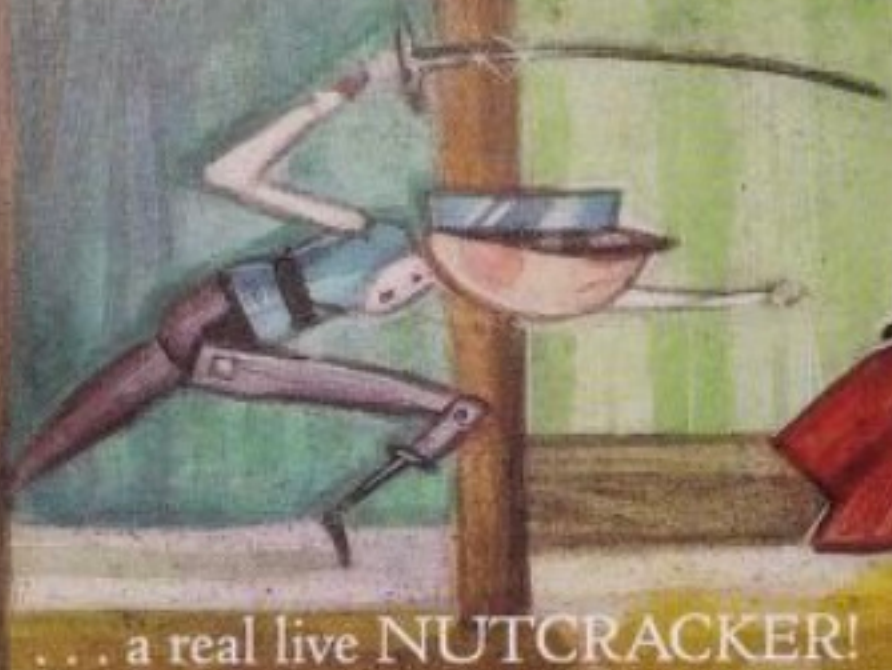


...THE MOUSE KING himself!

SURPRISE, SURPRISE!

"We meet at last," said the Mouse King, sneering at Fritz and raising his sword. "You've trapped a lot of mice in that nasty video game of yours, but now payback is mine!"

Fritz ducked and dodged, sure he was a goner, when suddenly someone else came bursting out of the closet...



... a real live NUTCRACKER!



IF IT ISN'T MY

The Nutcracker gave a CHOP!



YOU WON'T GET AWAY THIS TIME,
CHEESE BREATH!

A SMACK!



And a KICK!



FAVORITE NUTCRACKER!

And then the Nutcracker's hat came off,
and Fritz saw something he didn't expect . . .



And just then, the Mouse King slipped back
inside the toy closet and was gone.

"Hurry!" said the Nutcracker to Fritz,
"we've got to catch the Mouse King before he
ruins Christmas!"

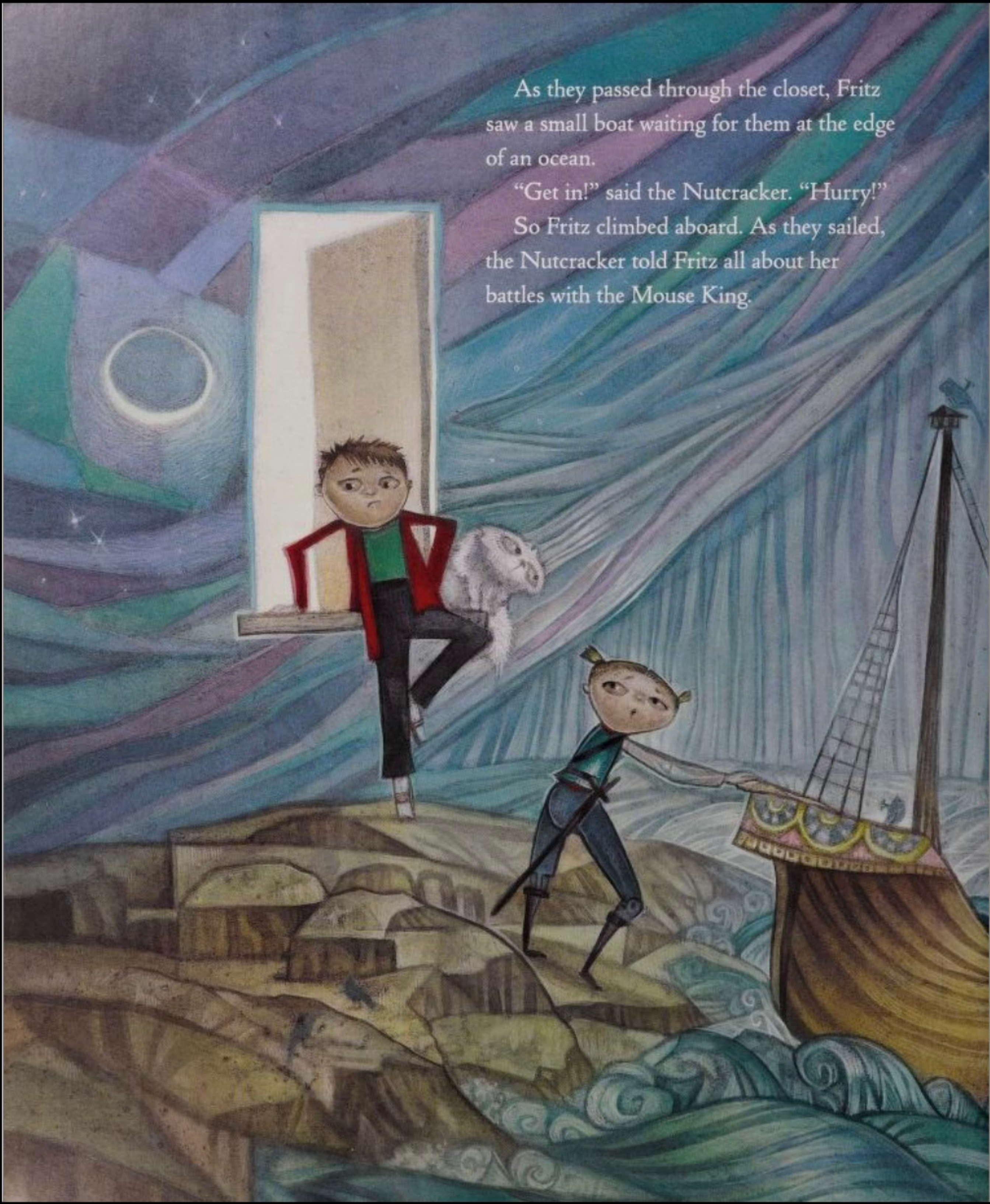
An adventure! Fritz liked the sound of that.
So he followed the Nutcracker into the toy closet,
wondering where in the world it would lead.

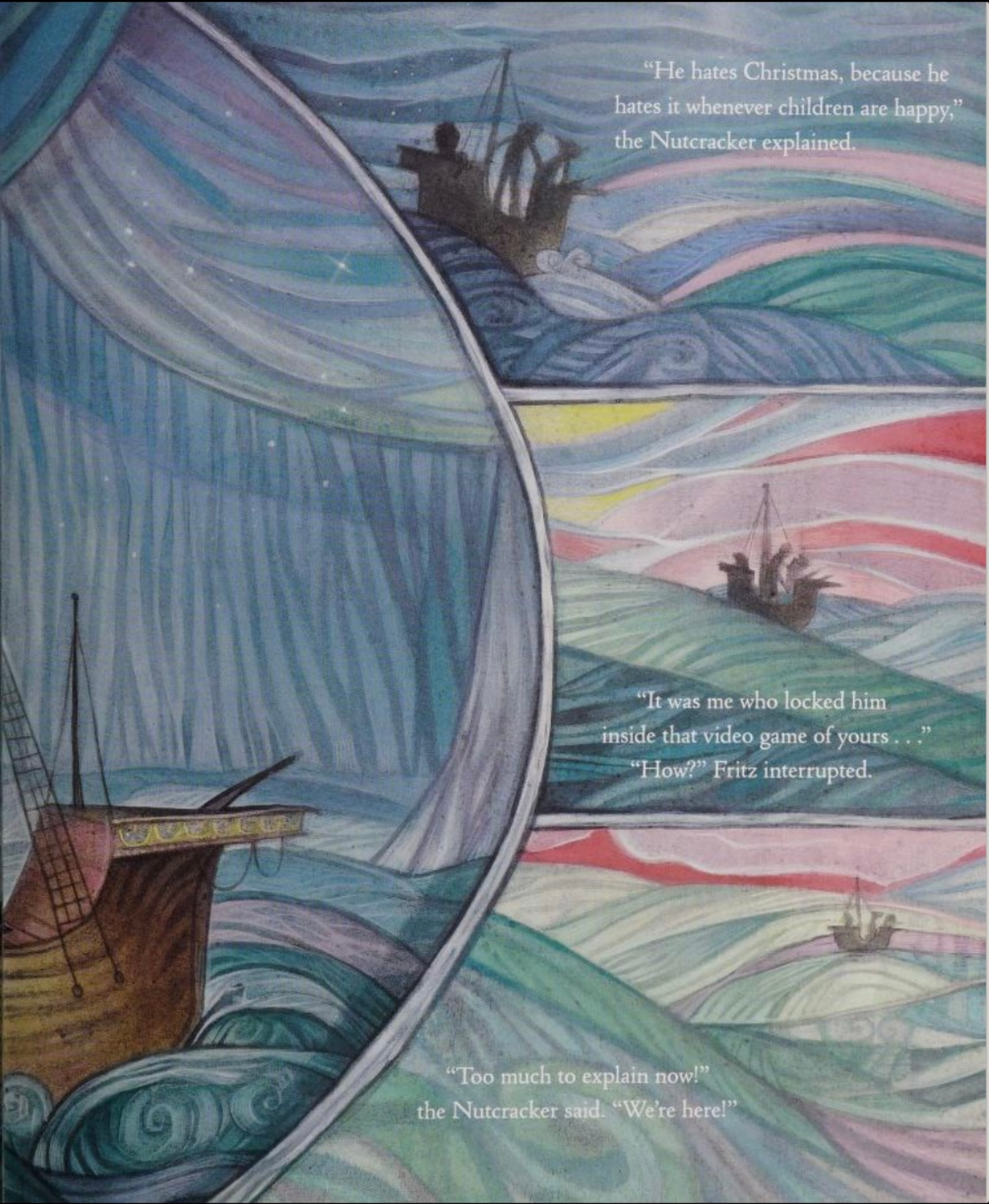


As they passed through the closet, Fritz saw a small boat waiting for them at the edge of an ocean.

"Get in!" said the Nutcracker. "Hurry!"

So Fritz climbed aboard. As they sailed, the Nutcracker told Fritz all about her battles with the Mouse King.





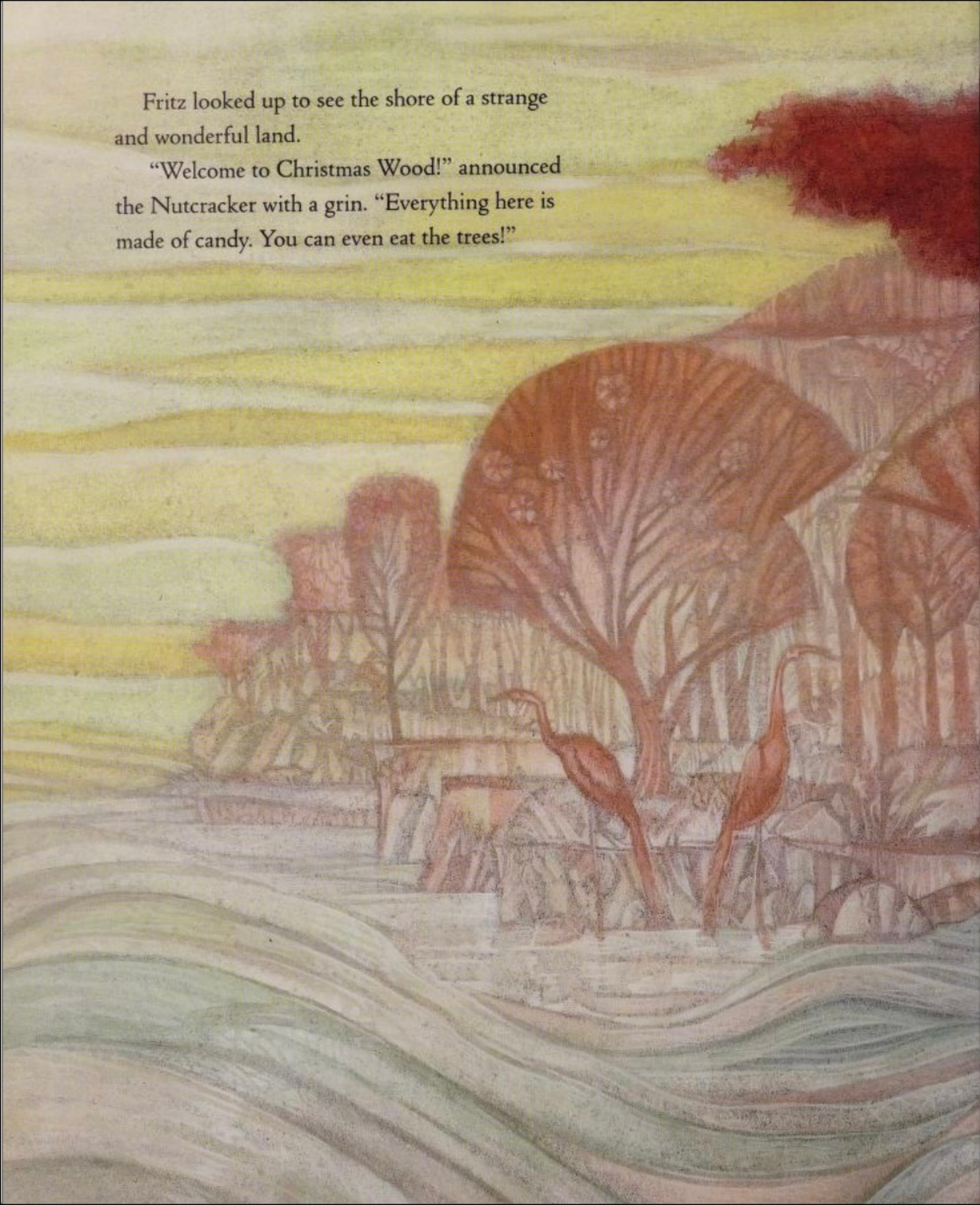
"He hates Christmas, because he hates it whenever children are happy," the Nutcracker explained.

"It was me who locked him inside that video game of yours . . ."
"How?" Fritz interrupted.

"Too much to explain now!"
the Nutcracker said. "We're here!"

Fritz looked up to see the shore of a strange and wonderful land.

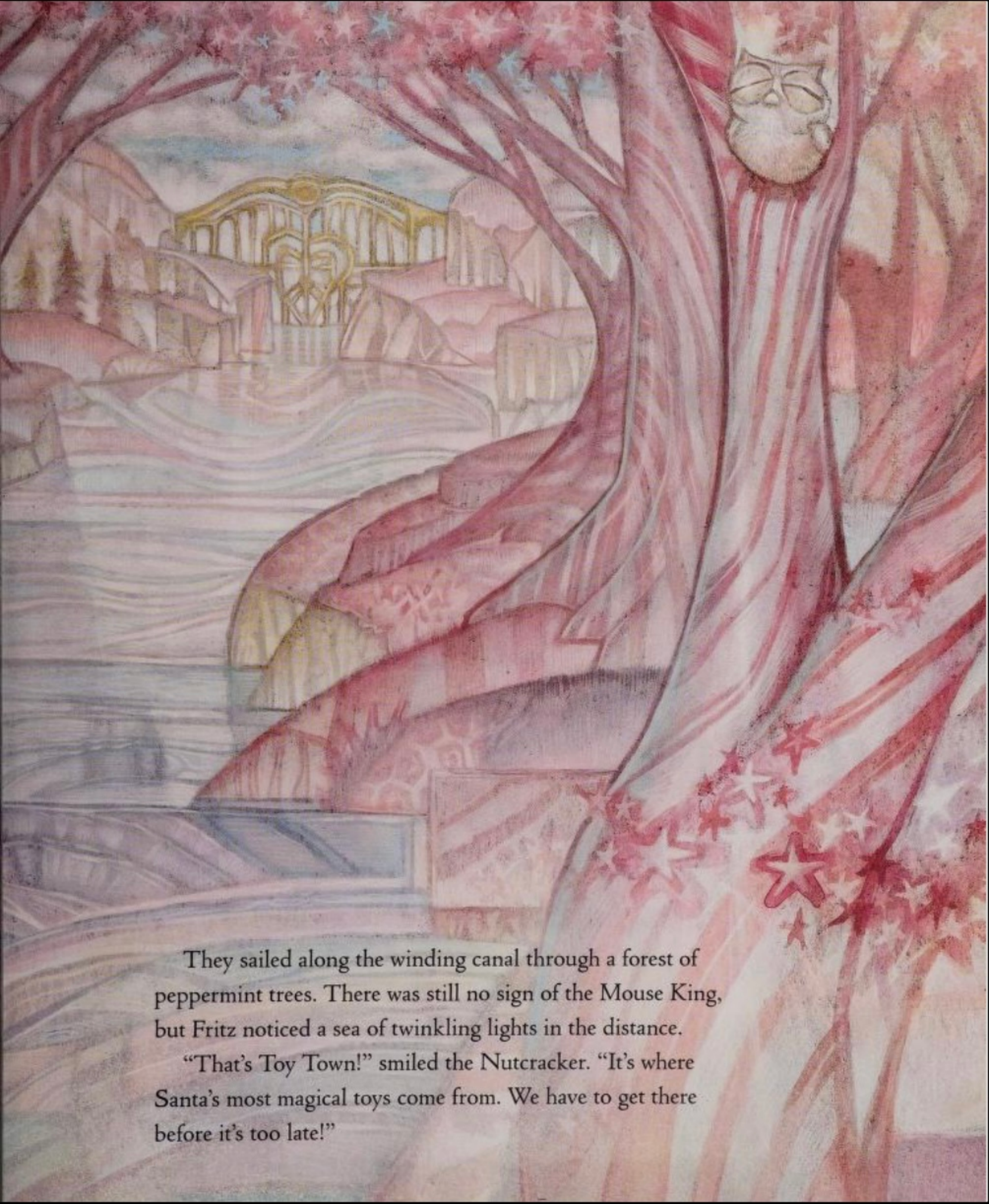
“Welcome to Christmas Wood!” announced the Nutcracker with a grin. “Everything here is made of candy. You can even eat the trees!”





Fritz snapped off a nearby twig—
it tasted like real peppermint!

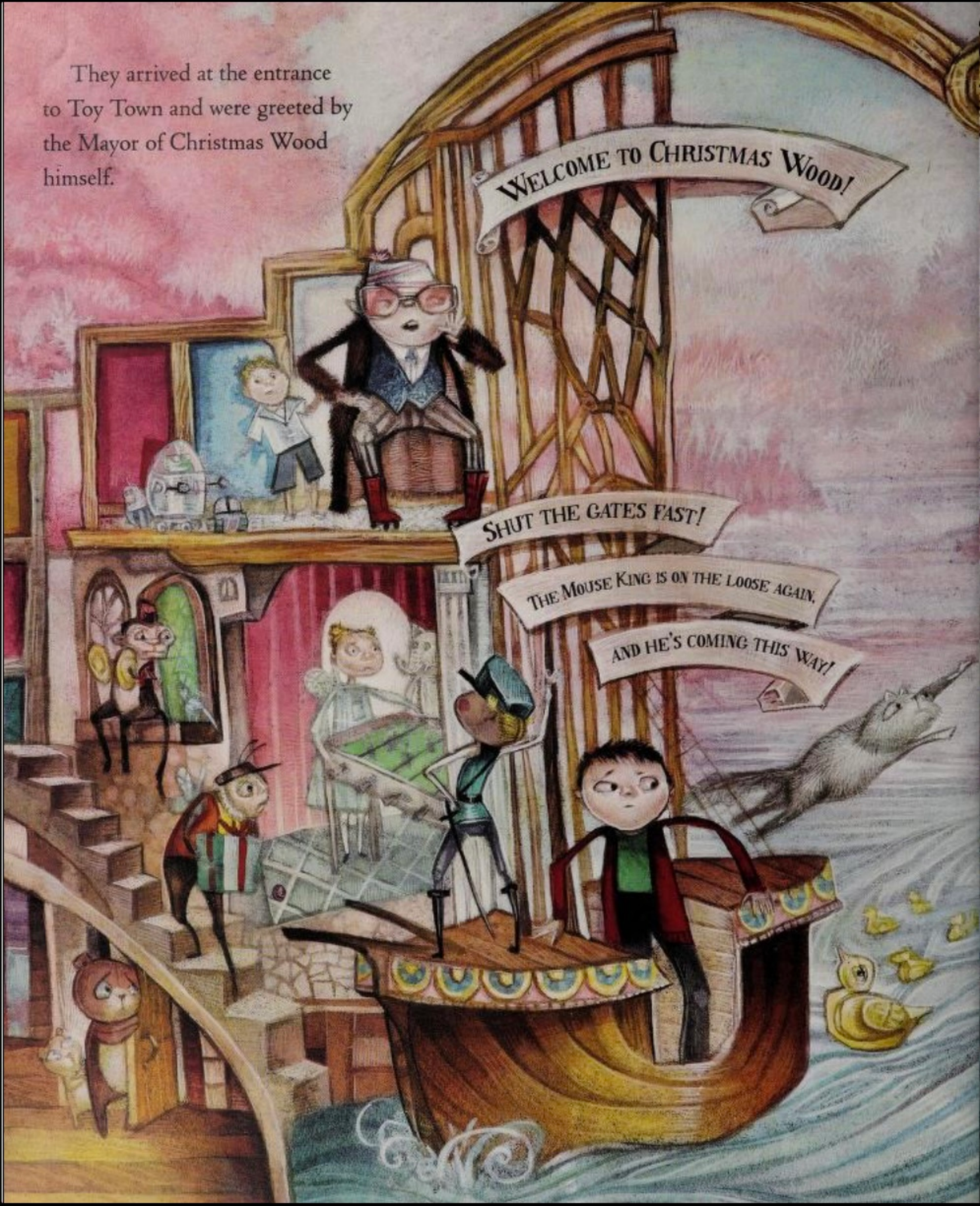


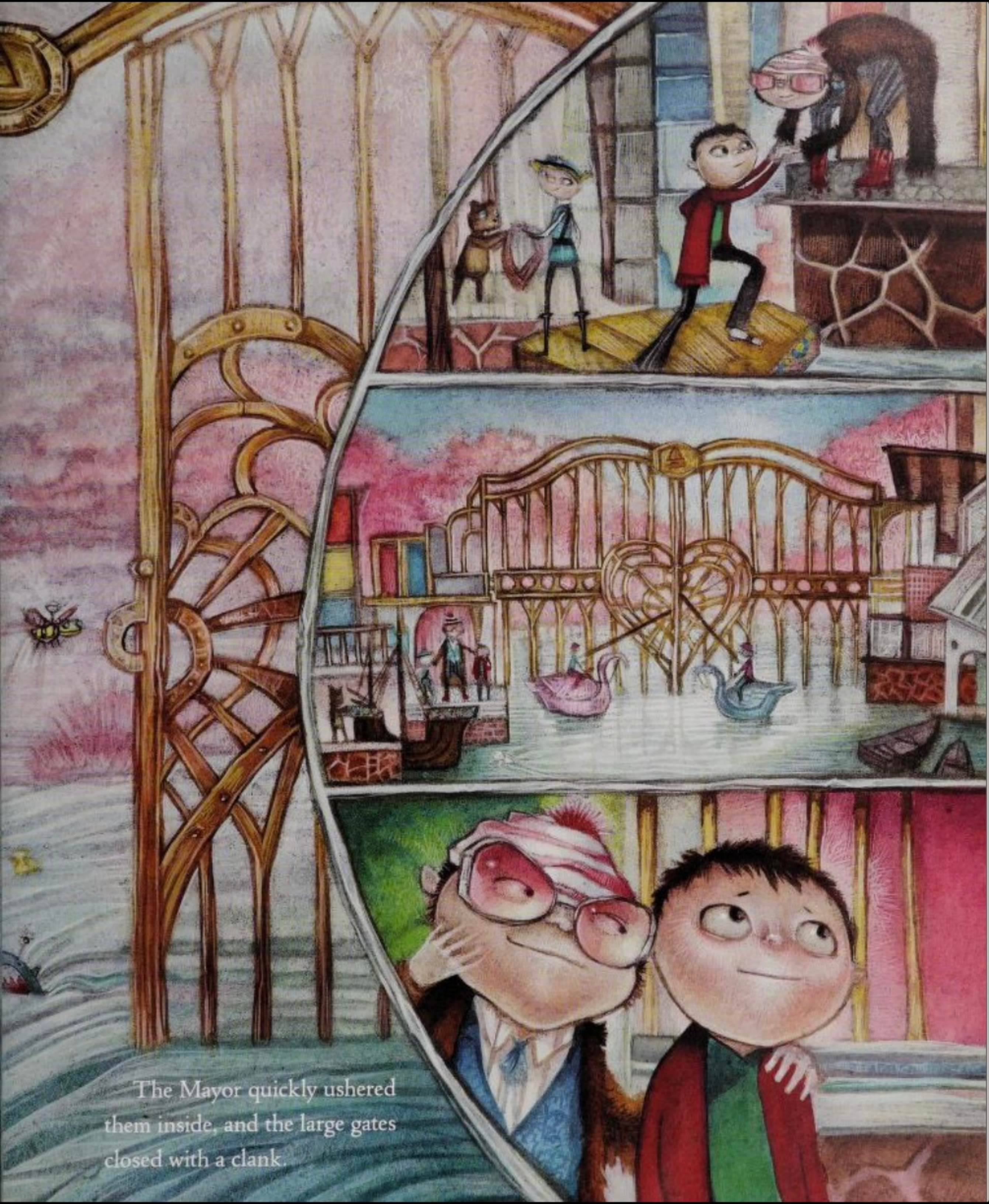


They sailed along the winding canal through a forest of peppermint trees. There was still no sign of the Mouse King, but Fritz noticed a sea of twinkling lights in the distance.

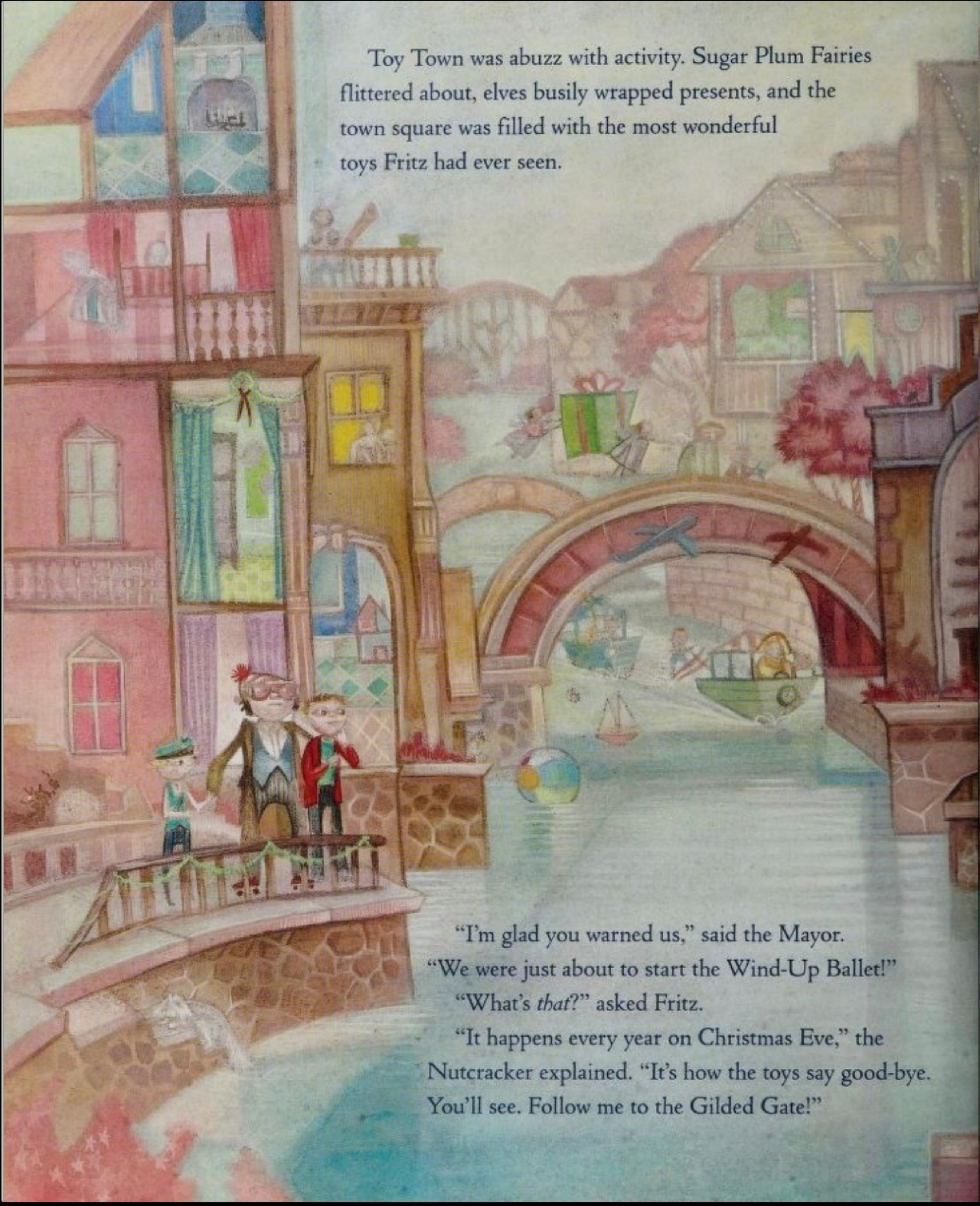
“That’s Toy Town!” smiled the Nutcracker. “It’s where Santa’s most magical toys come from. We have to get there before it’s too late!”

They arrived at the entrance
to Toy Town and were greeted by
the Mayor of Christmas Wood
himself.





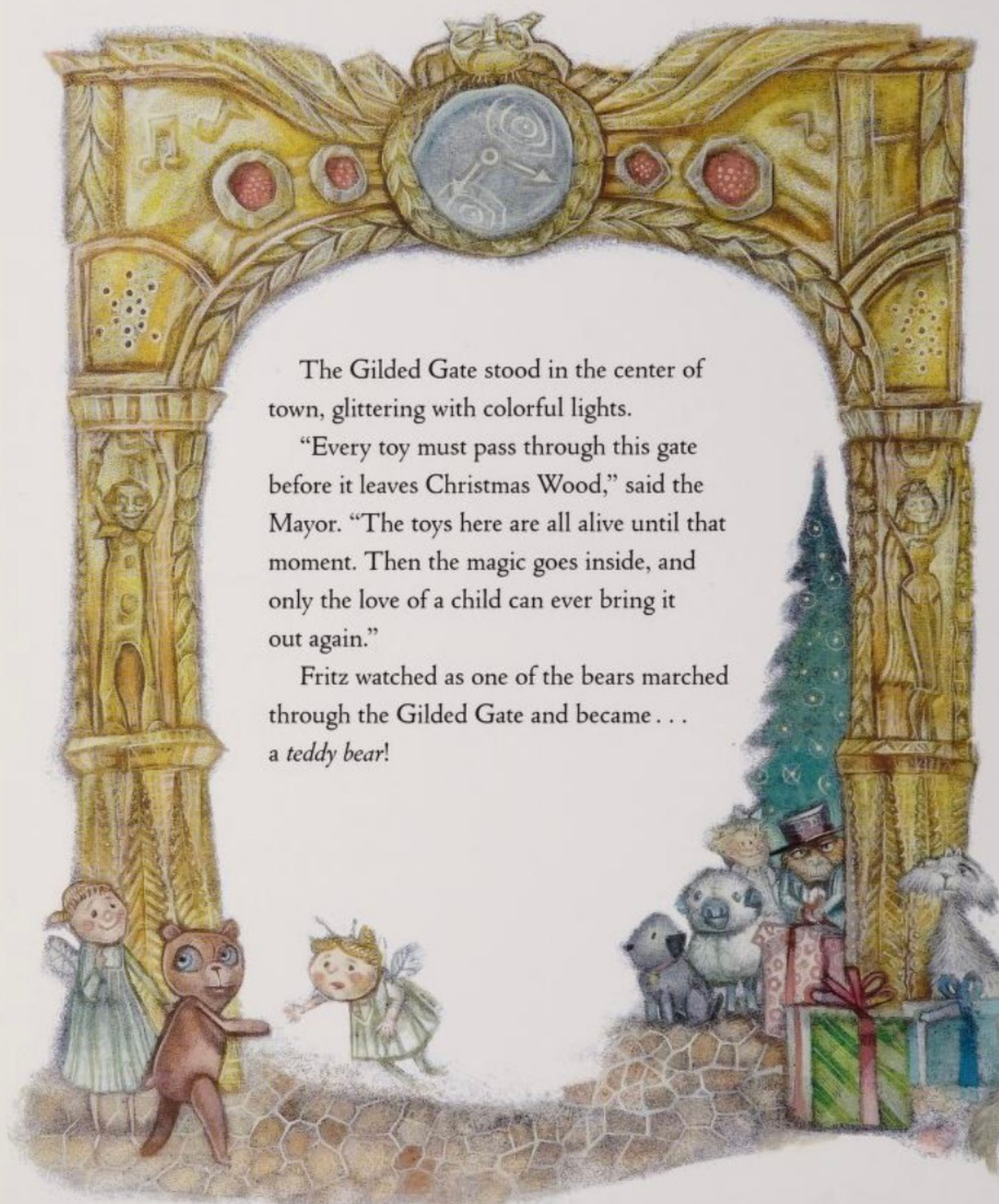
The Mayor quickly ushered them inside, and the large gates closed with a clank.



Toy Town was abuzz with activity. Sugar Plum Fairies flittered about, elves busily wrapped presents, and the town square was filled with the most wonderful toys Fritz had ever seen.

"I'm glad you warned us," said the Mayor.
"We were just about to start the Wind-Up Ballet!"
"What's *that*?" asked Fritz.
"It happens every year on Christmas Eve," the Nutcracker explained. "It's how the toys say good-bye. You'll see. Follow me to the Gilded Gate!"





The Gilded Gate stood in the center of town, glittering with colorful lights.

"Every toy must pass through this gate before it leaves Christmas Wood," said the Mayor. "The toys here are all alive until that moment. Then the magic goes inside, and only the love of a child can ever bring it out again."

Fritz watched as one of the bears marched through the Gilded Gate and became . . . a *teddy bear*!





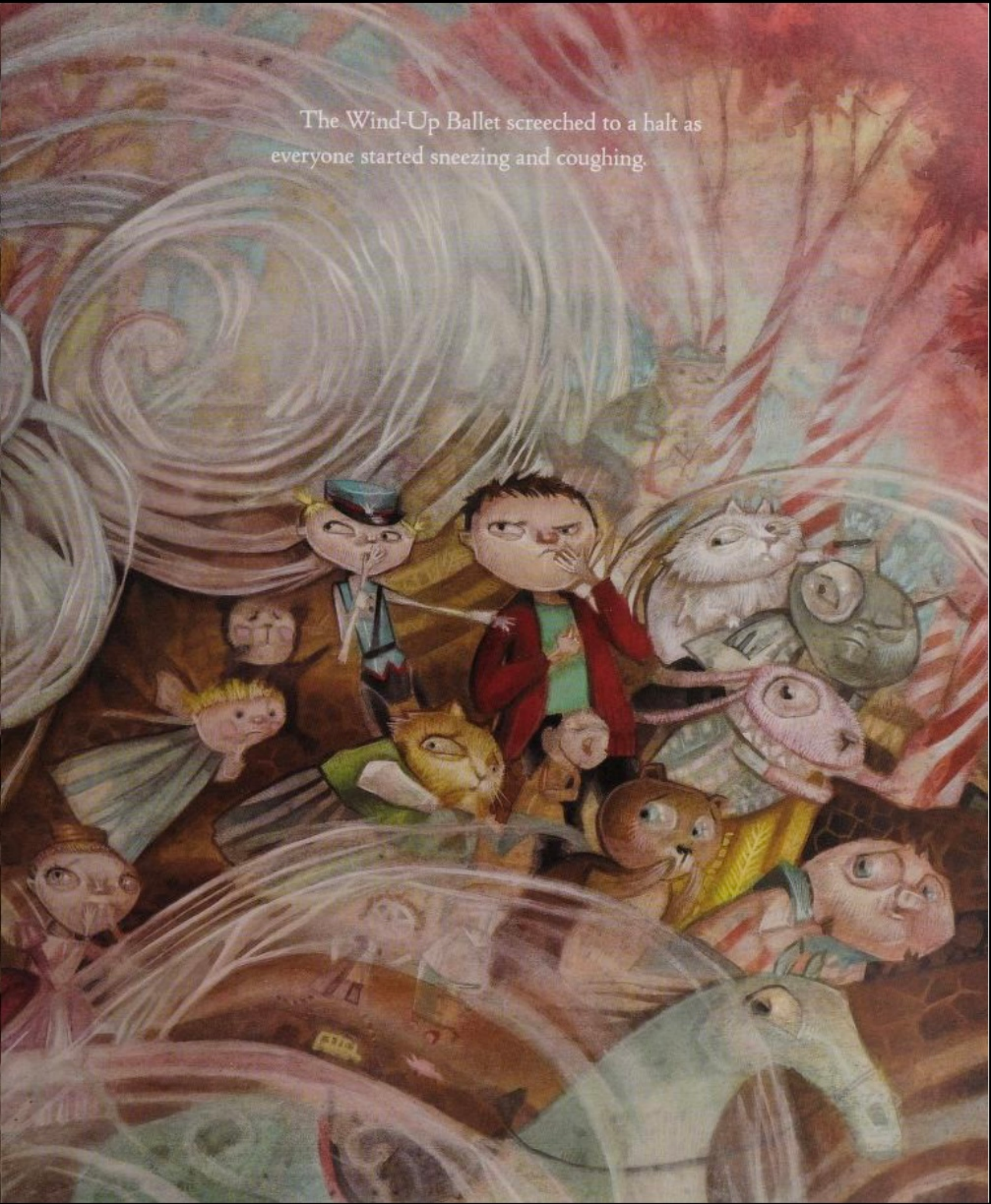
Music filled the air as the toys danced with the elves and fairies, spinning and cartwheeling toward the Gilded Gate. Everyone was so entranced by the ballet that they didn't notice the dark figure emerging from the shadows . . .

THE MOUSE KING!



“Looks like I’m just in time,” said the wretched rodent, spraying clouds of nasty, stinky cheese everywhere.

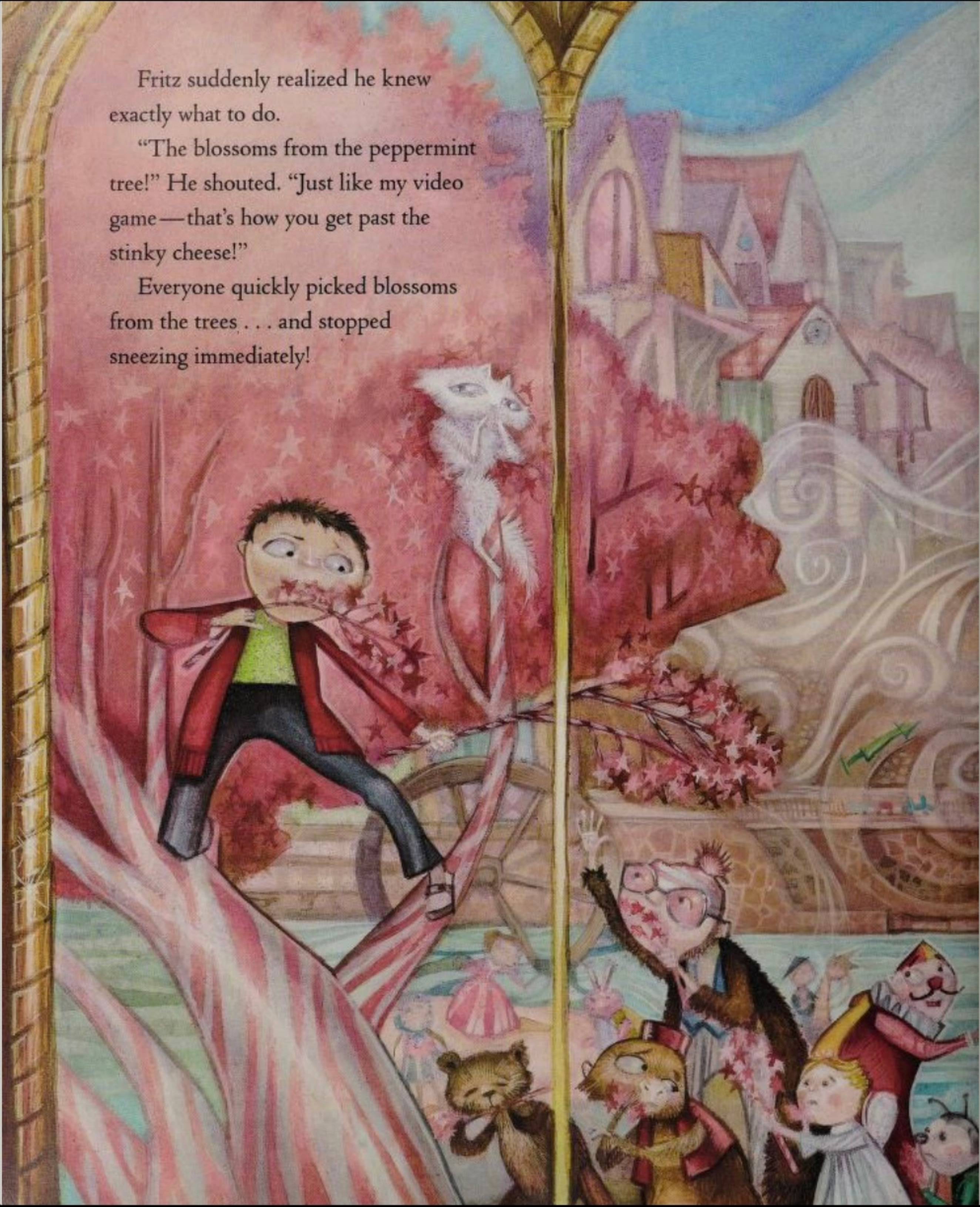
The Wind-Up Ballet screeched to a halt as everyone started sneezing and coughing.



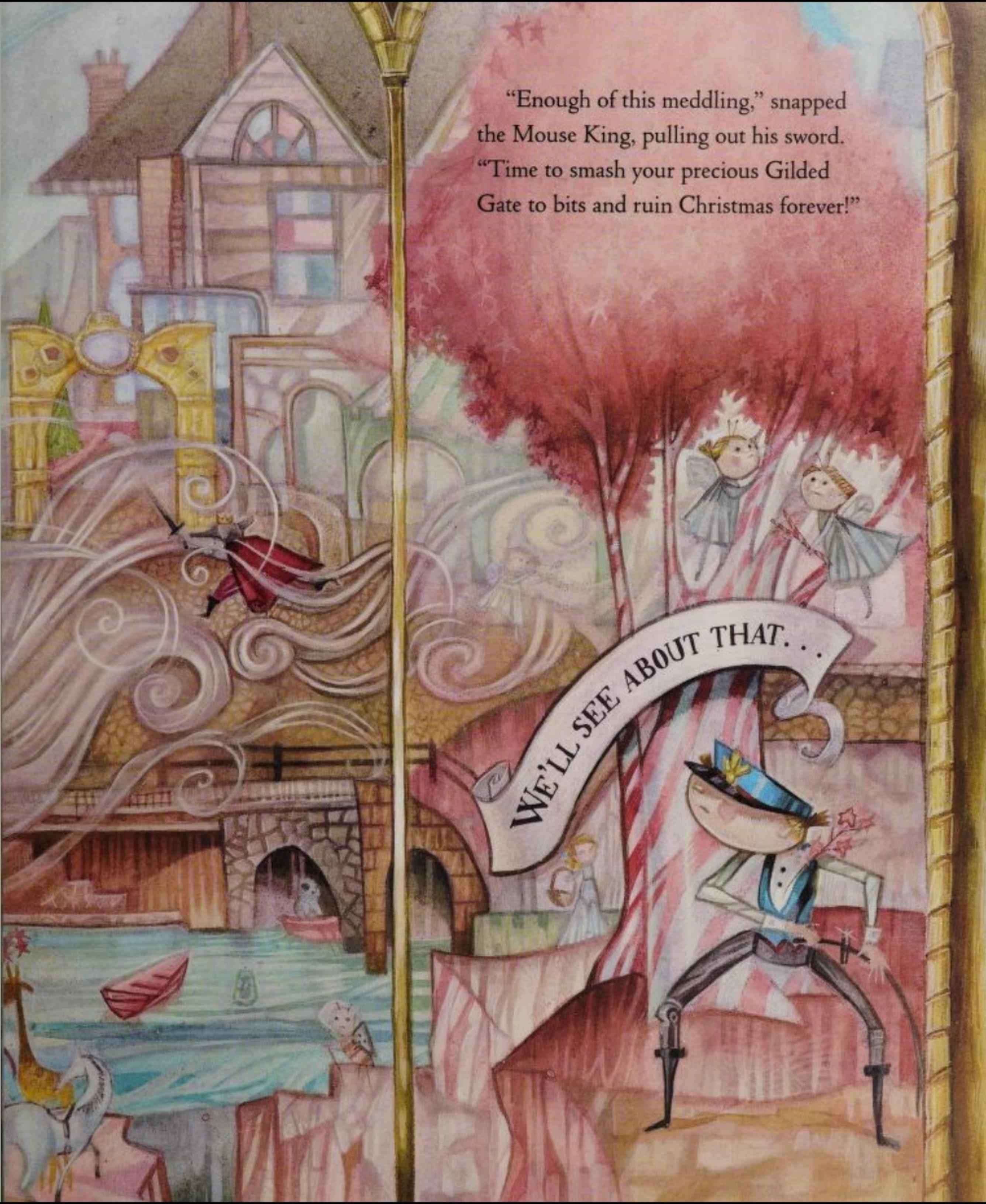
Fritz suddenly realized he knew exactly what to do.

"The blossoms from the peppermint tree!" He shouted. "Just like my video game—that's how you get past the stinky cheese!"

Everyone quickly picked blossoms from the trees . . . and stopped sneezing immediately!



"Enough of this meddling," snapped the Mouse King, pulling out his sword. "Time to smash your precious Gilded Gate to bits and ruin Christmas forever!"



The Nutcracker drew her sword.
"You'll have to get through *me* first."



"With pleasure," hissed the Mouse King.
CLASH! SMASH! "Take that,
you overgrown hamster!"



WHACK! THWACK!

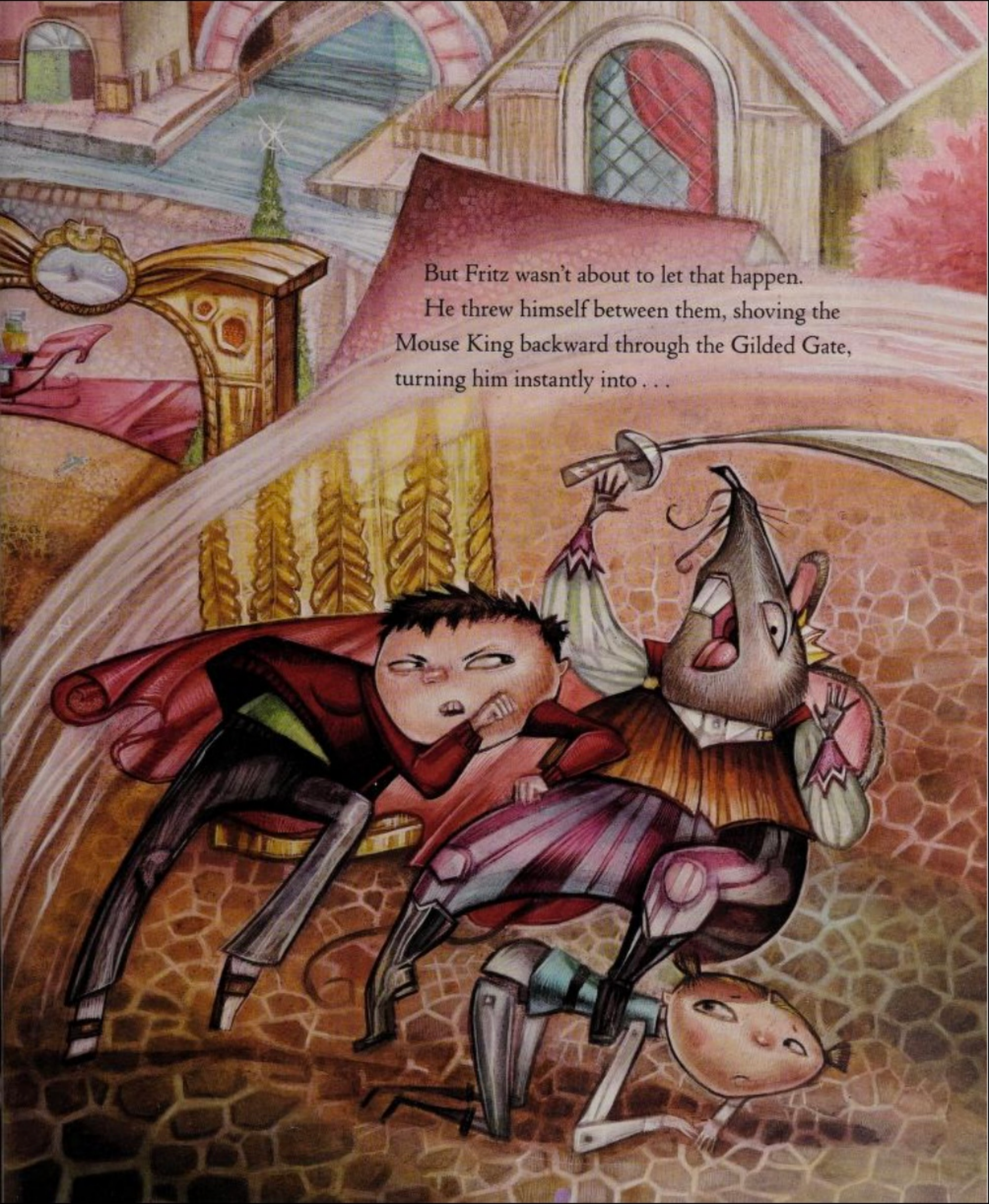
"Oh, no!" cried the Nutcracker as her sword was knocked from her hands. It flew through the Gilded Gate and came out as a toy sword on the other side!

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO STOP HIM NOW!



“Looks like it’s GAME OVER for you, Nutty!” growled the Mouse King, raising his sword to finish her off.



A vibrant, stylized illustration of a scene in a castle courtyard. In the foreground, a young boy with dark hair, wearing a red tunic and a flowing red cape, is lunging forward with a determined expression. He is holding a large, ornate golden key. Behind him, a mouse king with a long, pointed snout, wearing a brown and red striped tunic and a crown, is also lunging. He holds a golden scepter in his right hand. In the lower right, a small girl with brown hair, wearing a white dress, is lying on the cobblestone ground, looking up at the boy and mouse king. The background features a large, arched stone gateway with a red curtain, and a pink flower bush to the right. The overall style is whimsical and colorful, with a focus on action and fantasy elements.

But Fritz wasn't about to let that happen.
He threw himself between them, shoving the
Mouse King backward through the Gilded Gate,
turning him instantly into . . .



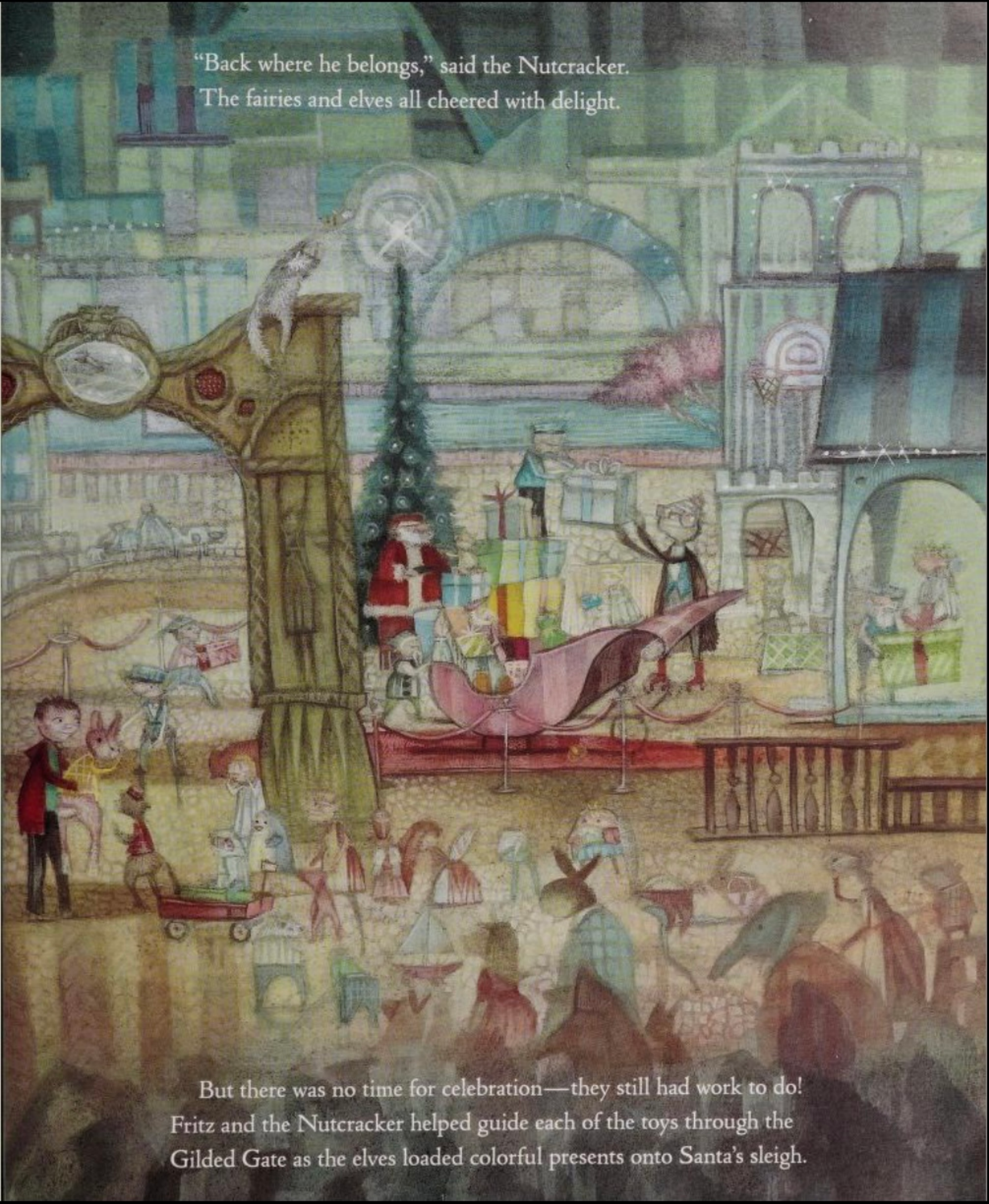
"A VIDEO GAME!" cried Fritz.



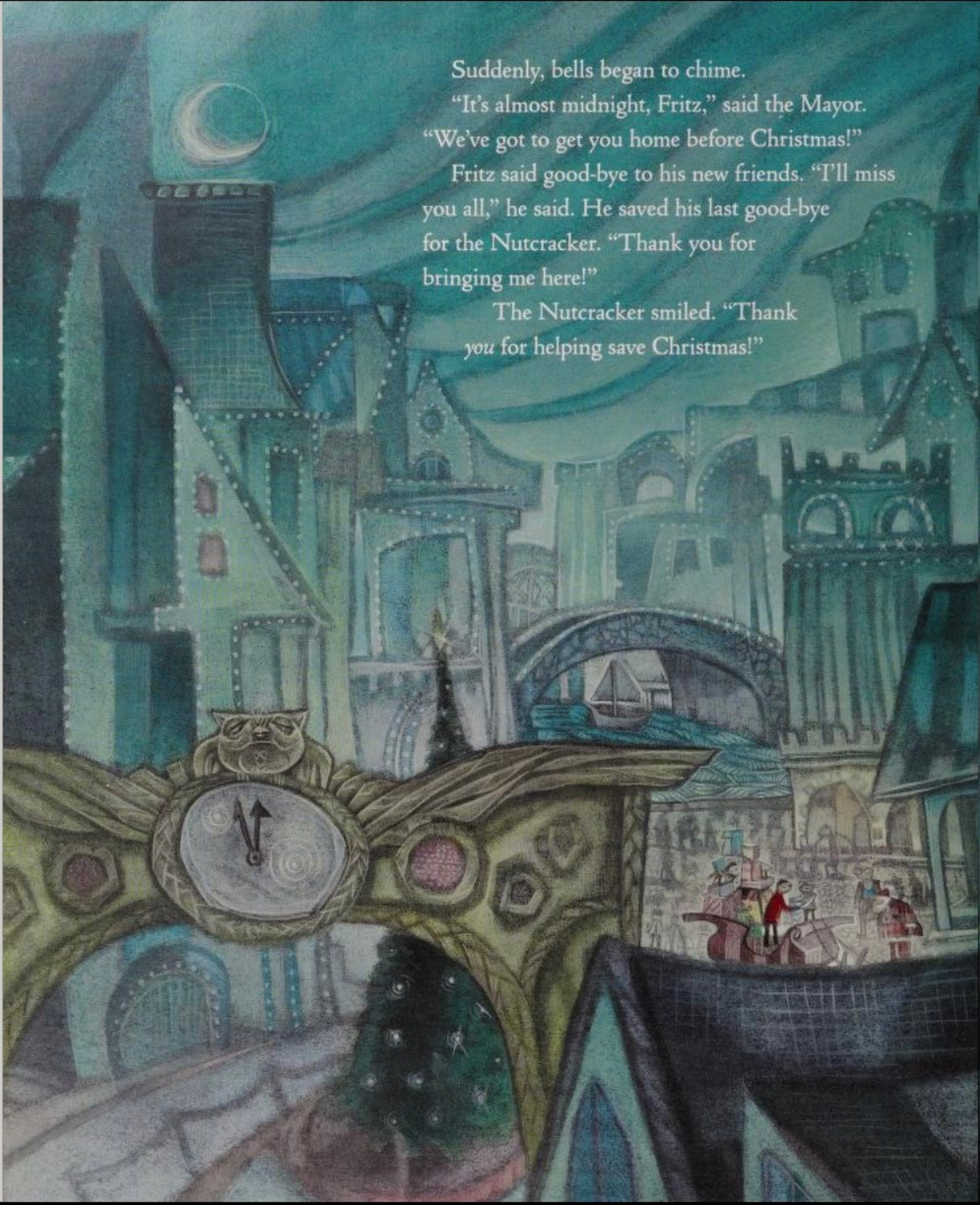
"And look—the Mouse King is trapped inside!"



"Back where he belongs," said the Nutcracker.
The fairies and elves all cheered with delight.



But there was no time for celebration—they still had work to do!
Fritz and the Nutcracker helped guide each of the toys through the
Gilded Gate as the elves loaded colorful presents onto Santa's sleigh.

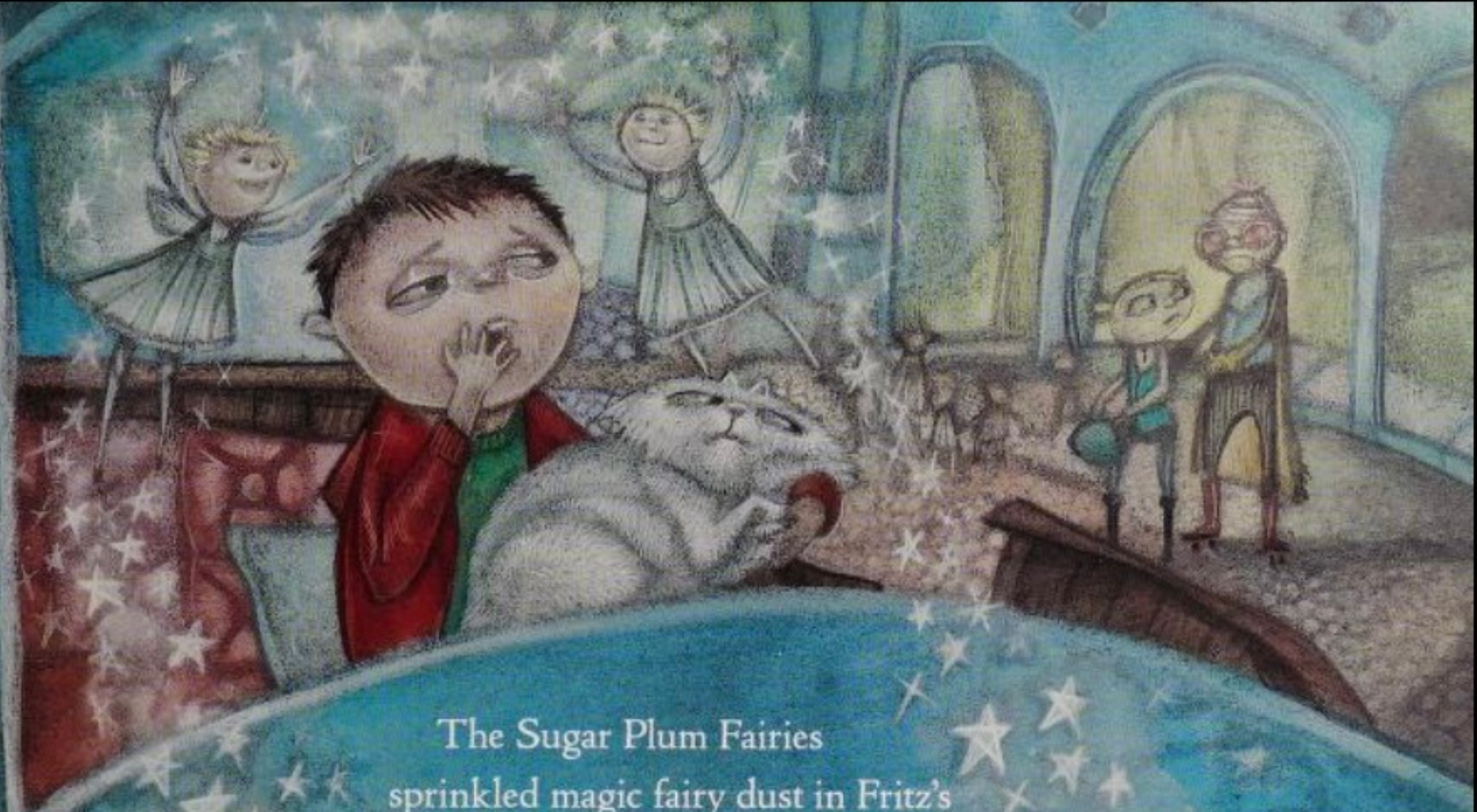
A whimsical illustration of a town at night. In the foreground, a large, ornate clock with a cat's face on top is visible. The clock face shows the time as approximately 11:55. The town in the background features various buildings, a bridge over a river with a sailboat, and a small Christmas tree. The sky is dark blue with a crescent moon. The overall style is painterly and festive.

Suddenly, bells began to chime.

"It's almost midnight, Fritz," said the Mayor.
"We've got to get you home before Christmas!"

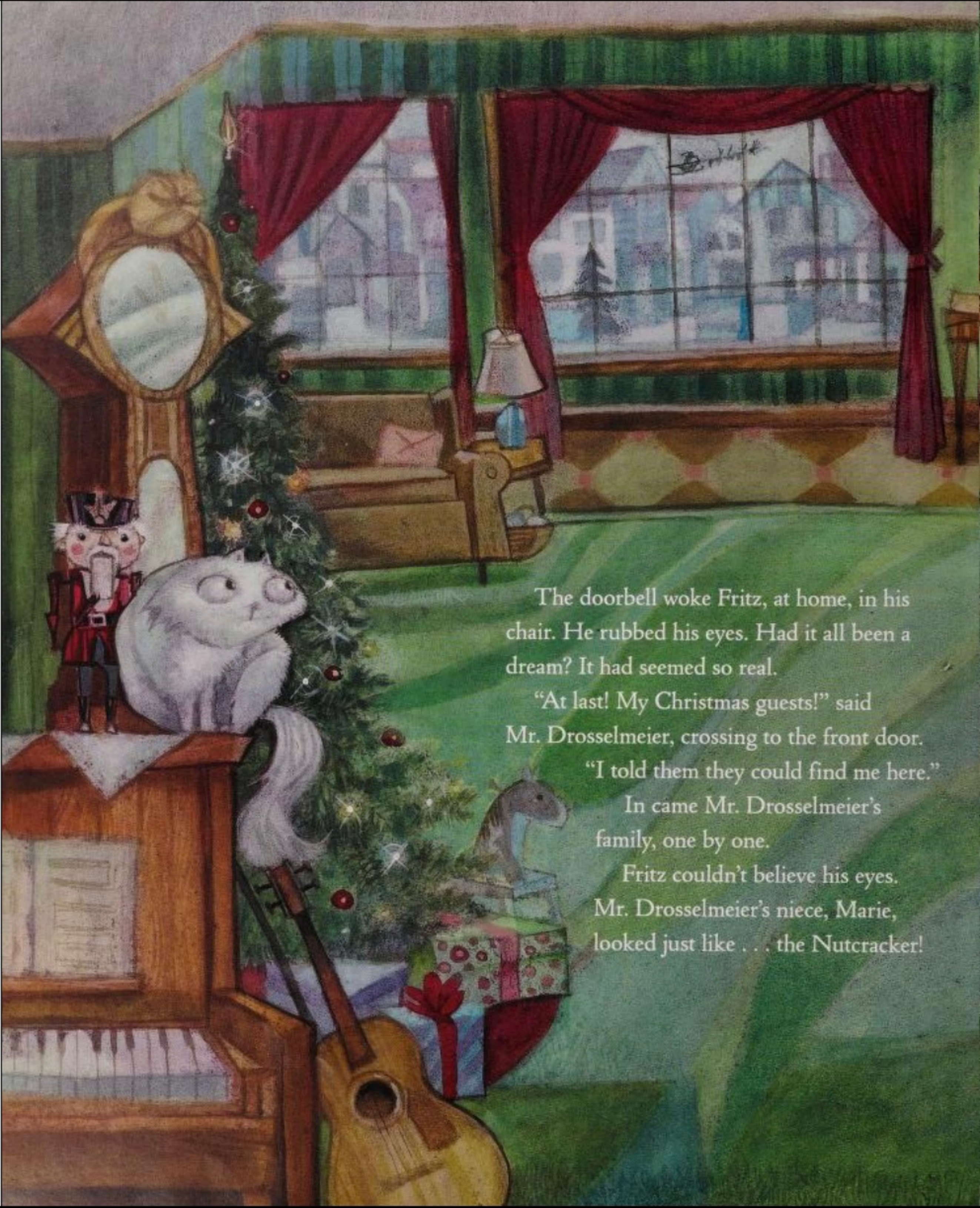
Fritz said good-bye to his new friends. "I'll miss you all," he said. He saved his last good-bye for the Nutcracker. "Thank you for bringing me here!"

The Nutcracker smiled. "Thank you for helping save Christmas!"



The Sugar Plum Fairies
sprinkled magic fairy dust in Fritz's
eyes making him feel very sleepy...





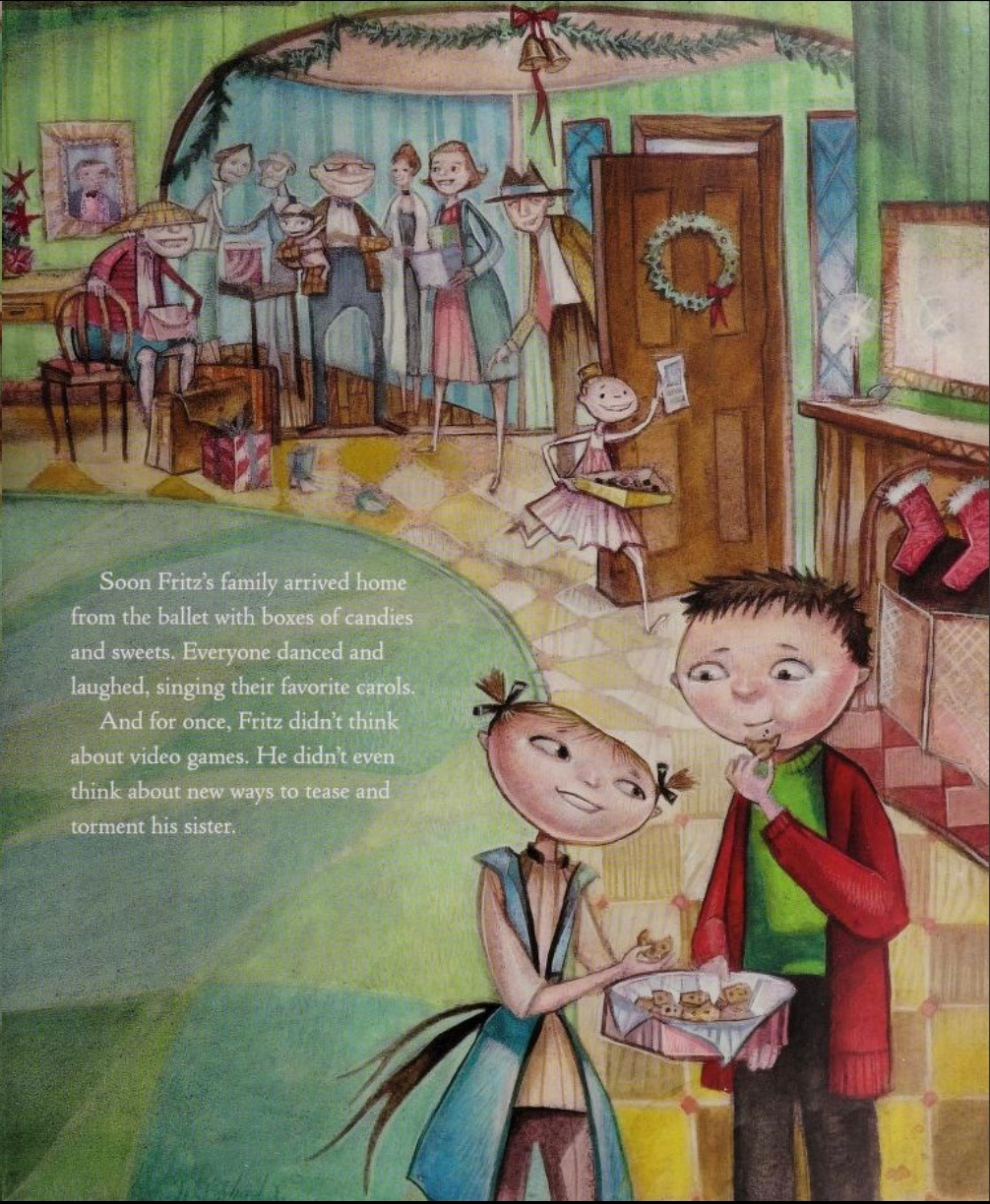
The doorbell woke Fritz, at home, in his chair. He rubbed his eyes. Had it all been a dream? It had seemed so real.

"At last! My Christmas guests!" said Mr. Drosselmeier, crossing to the front door.

"I told them they could find me here."

In came Mr. Drosselmeier's family, one by one.

Fritz couldn't believe his eyes. Mr. Drosselmeier's niece, Marie, looked just like . . . the Nutcracker!



Soon Fritz's family arrived home from the ballet with boxes of candies and sweets. Everyone danced and laughed, singing their favorite carols.

And for once, Fritz didn't think about video games. He didn't even think about new ways to tease and torment his sister.



Tonight, all he cared about was the Nutcracker.

RALPH COVERT is a singer and songwriter who also writes plays, musicals, and books. His first children's album, *Ralph's World* (2001), was called one of the finest children's albums of that or any year by *Billboard* magazine. He lives in Chicago.

G. RILEY MILLS has never danced in *The Nutcracker*, but he did perform once as the left half of a singing, dancing Siamese twin vaudeville act in a circus. Also an award-winning playwright, he lives with his family in Chicago.

WILSON SWAIN is a tall man with a sharpened pencil and a permanent expression of mild surprise. An illustrator at heart since he was a child growing up on the prairies of Illinois, he now lives in Southern California. For this book, he took inspiration from holiday cards of the 1960s, store window displays of the 1950s, and cartoon ephemera of the 1940s. He's currently in the 2000s.



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